

# Golden years for Wycombe

**OUTSTANDING** success in the mid-1950's and in the 1970's have been the highlights of Wycombe Wanderers history over the last 3 years, which has seen the club emerge as one of the top clubs outside the Football League.

Before the 50's there was, of course, Wycombe's magnificent achievement of winning the Amateur Cup when they beat Hayes 1-0 at Highbury. With the price of a train ticket just 2s. 6d., 32,000 spectators witnessed Wanderers' one and only Amateur Cup final triumph.

It took the Blues 26 years to return to the final and this time fervent Wycombe fans almost filled Wembley Stadium. That final, in 1957 must rank as the club's finest hour. Let me take you back to that glorious season.

To reach Wembley the Blues had to overcome St Albans 4-1, Clapton 4-2, Hounslow 3-1, Ilford 2-0 after a 3-3 draw and then

Corinthian Casuals 4-2 in the semi-final at Highbury. Wanderers notched a total of 20 goals for while only nine were conceded. Paul Bates, a powerful striker, hit eight goals in the cup run.

What happened during the 90 minutes must have been a shattering disappointment to the club, players and fans with mighty Bishop Auckland winning 3-1. But despite that, there was a magnificent reception waiting for the team back in High Wycombe. As you can see from Ronald Goodearl's picture, the High Street was packed with Wycombe followers paying their tribute to a great side.

The Amateur Cup, sadly, is no more — a victim of the F.A.'s decision to abolish amateurism three years ago. It ran from 1873-1974 and now non-league clubs compete in the F.A. Trophy.

The man behind the success was manager Sid Cann who apart from that Amateur Cup run, guided Wycombe to two, Isthmian League Championships in 1955 and '56. The following year Wanderers were runners-up.

The 60's saw the rise of Wimbledon and Enfield. The 'Dons' took the title three years in succession in '62, '62-3-4, a feat emulated by Enfield in '68-69-70.

## CONSTERNATION

But while Enfield were enjoying unprecedented success, things were happening at Loakes Park. The club appointed a new manager who scrapped the reserve side and selection committee. These new ideas from Mr Brian Lee caused some consternation among supporters but the wisdom of the moves was soon to be seen.

Within a year Lee had brought new players to the club, players from far afield and with them came a run of success unequalled in the club's 91 year history. Runners up to Enfield in 1970, the Blues clinched the title for the next two years, finished fourth in 1972-3 and then won two more championships before finishing runners up again last season. Now, in 1977, the club has clinched second place once more.

Brian Lee retired from management in 1976 but most fans will remember him for his remarkable F.A. Cup success. Never before had Wanderers been past the second round of the Cup but under Lee's leadership, Wycombe reached the second round three times and in 1975 thrilled thousands throughout the country by making the elusive round three.

## MOTIVATION

Having disposed of A.F.C. Bournemouth 2-1 away after a goalless draw at Loakes Park, Wanderers were pitted against Middlesbrough, then joint top of the Football League. No one gave them a chance, even their manager went on television to

say his side had 'no chance'. But the astute Brian Lee had other ideas and his shrewd motivation produced the best from his players who held might 'Boro' to 0-0 in front of 12,000 people jam-packed into the ground.

Jack Charlton, the former England and Leeds centre half, sipped a scotch and smoked a cigarette in the board room afterwards. I remember asking him if he was relieved to have escaped with a replay, his reply — "\*\*\*\*!!\* relieved!" Charlton, in fact, was much more confident about the return at Ayresome Park but his "We'll murder them" prediction again lifted the Wanderers team. They withstood everything the First Division giants could throw at them before finally conceding a goal in the 89th minute to Dave Armstrong.

The 1,000 fans who had made the long haul from High Wycombe were disappointed, the 29,000 home supporters breathed a sigh of relief and then stood to salute Wycombe Wanderers with chants of "Wycombe!, Wycombe!". A standing ovation from a partisan crowd was a fitting climax to a remarkable cup run.

Not that everything has been 'roses' over the last 25 years. There was the Berks and Bucks Senior Cup rumpus when Wanderers refused the cup, several committee changes and the dismissal of Ted Powell this year. But those problems have been small compared with the enjoyment given by the club to the sporting public.

## DWINDLING

One sad aspect of the club's fortunes have been the dwindling attendances. There can be few clubs in the South, professional or 'amateur', who have matched Wycombe for entertainment over the years and yet the 8,000 Saturday League match crowds of the 50's have fallen to 1,500 of today.

No-one knows the solution to the problem which has been argued from Land's End to John O'Groats. But there's no getting away from the fact that clubs will eventually suffer from this dwindling of income.

Wycombe Wanderers are better off than most, still being one of the best supported non-league clubs in the country. They deserve it too, for there's no doubting the fact that the last 25 years have been golden years for the town's football club.

STORY BY STUART EARP